

Robert Kemp Clips

(Appeared on MileHighSports.com)

When it comes to concussions the Denver Broncos have been lucky... we think

With only four diagnosed concussions this past season, the Denver Broncos were incredibly lucky.

Concussions have increased by 31.55% during preseason and regular season play this past year according to a report released by the NFL in January. In total there were 271 concussions diagnosed last season, excluding the post season. That averages out to about 8 diagnosed concussions per team.

The key word there is “diagnosed.” Back in 2011, then Indianapolis Colts quarterback, Peyton Manning, admitted that he went out of his way to underperform during the NFL’s preseason baseline concussion test. By setting the bar low, “The Sheriff” was putting himself in a position to stay on the field in the event of a head injury. There is so much at stake for players that they are willing to risk more than is healthy.

On Monday, NFL Senior Vice President for Health and Safety Jeff Miller offered the league’s first unequivocal acknowledgement of the potential link between football and the degenerative brain disease Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE).

Miller was speaking in front of a congressional committee during a round table discussion on concussions when U.S. Rep. Jane Schakowsky asked whether Miller thought there could be a connection between football and brain diseases like CTE.

“The answer to that question is certainly yes,” Miller said.

Prior to Miller's admission, a number of measures had already been taken to avoid concussions. While most high school athletes are sweating it out in full pads, performing full-contact drills at least twice a week, the professionals in the NFL are limited to a mere 14 full-pad practices during the regular season.

According to PracticeLikePros.com, only 3 percent of concussions in the NFL happen on the practice field, while that number for high school programs is between 60 to 75 percent. There seems to be little consensus as to what the proper amount of contact in practice should be. Ivy League football programs, for example, removed full-contact practices entirely just this year.

The NFL has also increased their penalties for helmet-to-helmet collisions. As a result there has been a noticeable shift in the way players hit. At one point Owen Daniels went so far as to thank Reggie Nelson of the Cincinnati Bengals for a clean hit delivered to his midsection.

Strangely, there is very little guidance on what kind of helmet players should wear. During Super Bowl 50 Aqib Talib was the only player on the field wearing a helmet made by the equipment manufacturer Xenith.

The increase in concussion diagnoses could be a symptom of a better system that includes spotters and tests. At the end of the day teams still rely heavily on players to self-report and admit to concussion symptoms. For players with so much of their future riding on their health, or the appearance of health, the decision to self-report isn't a simple one.

Either the Denver Broncos got lucky ... or they're just really good at pretending to be concussion free.

(Appeared in MetroWest Newspapers)

Brighton rescue services connect with community

Firefighters, policemen and a wide assortment of other public servants descended upon Prairie Center last Saturday for the annual Brighton Fire Rescue Safety Fair.

Captain Brycen Garrison of the Adams County Fire Department served as a master of ceremonies for many of the events and demonstrations throughout the day.

“We’re just trying to show the fire department off to the people that we serve. There’s a lot of people in the community that don’t get to see everything that we do,” Brycen said. “They see the fire trucks go by and hear the sirens but there’s a lot more to it than that.”

During one demonstration Adams County firefighters used tools that looked like giant pincers, often referred to as the “jaws of life,” to simulate a car extrication. The firefighters methodically dismantled a small sedan with their power tools, breaking the windows and even removing the roof.

“A lot of people don’t understand, when they get in an accident, exactly how we’re going to get them out,” Brycen said. “So what we’re trying to demonstrate is, there’s a lot that goes into technique and expertise of cutting up a vehicle.”

Surprisingly one of the most entertaining safety demonstrations of the day was put on by the electrical utility company United Power. During their demonstration a hot dog served as a stand-in for a human hand and the crowd was awed by the effect that 7200 volts of electricity can have on soft tissue.

“We put this demonstration together to show the public and the fire department and police departments the dangers of high voltage,” United Power employee William Hottel said. “We do a lot with the fire department because they’re the first ones there (at an accident) and if there’s power lines on the ground or they’re parked on top of them we want to show them why we want them to stay away until we get there.”

Indeed Hottel’s own story served as a warning to those in attendance. Hottel stood in front of a large metal electrical cabinet and, with a prosthetic arm and a collection of scars, didn’t shy from telling his story.

“I was working in a cabinet like this and I assumed it was dead but it was energized and I reached in to tighten a bolt and 7200 volts to ground at my hand and wrist and I fell into it with my face,” Hottel said.

After that remark Hottel removed his glasses to show the scars covering his face.

“So just right there was 35 plastic surgeries,” Hottel said. “I was in a coma for a month, the rehab floor of a hospital for a month and then seven more months of rehab at Brighton.”

The Adams County Sheriff’s department made their presence known with a Lenco Bearcat armored car, which looked like a cross between an SUV and batmobile, along with a couple of fully armored SWAT operators. Deputy Benson of the Adams County Sheriff’s office smiled as he interacted with the children brave enough to approach.

“The goal is to show the tools that we use to keep ourselves safe and citizens safe and suspects that we’re actually attempting to apprehend safe,” Benson said. “With this we have a nice piece of cover that can keep us safe so even if somebody is shooting at us we have the ability to stay inside and wait it out and come to a peaceful solution instead of just storming in and shooting or killing someone.”

(Sports column appeared on MyMetMedia.com)

Victory at third place

Heat and the faint smell of tar emanated from the track as I placed my cleated feet on the starting blocks. It was the final heat of the 200-meter dash and I was surrounded by the fastest runners in the district. In five years of competition, I had never scored any points or placed as an individual but this was my last race, and I was determined to make it count.

It had been a hard year for me. Football season was a bust. We lost all but two games. We were a running joke among our classmates and, as team captain, I was sort of ‘king of the losers.’ My parents were contemplating divorce and graduation was looming. I was hurdling toward adulthood but in that moment I was still a kid, and all I wanted to do was run.

The official raised his starting pistol. I leaned forward, body taught. I took a breath and held it. The shot came, and I was out of my blocks without realizing it. My stumpy legs ate up the distance and I passed a runner. Then another. Reality seemed to blur. All sound faded and I could feel the rotation of the planet. The stars overhead seemed to streak across the sky and warmth flowed through my body. Joy pounded in my chest and for the first time, I smiled during a race.

When I crossed the finish line, I had passed all but two runners.

My teammates gave me high-fives and I blushed when the girls’ track team gave me hugs. Then my coach walked up to us and pulled me aside.

He put his arm around my shoulders and said, “Before this race I told the other coaches that you were as fast as you were ever going to get.” He showed me his stopwatch with my time on it. It

was significantly faster than I'd ever run. "You shattered that tonight," he said. He put his hands on my shoulders and held me at arm's length.

"Don't ever let anyone doubt you," he said. "Don't ever let anyone tell you that you're done."

I didn't win that night and most would count that as a loss, but it's more complicated than that. I learned more by earning third place than I ever could by winning.

Sports are more than winning and losing. Sports are like a river that anyone can dive into and get to where they need to go. They give people hope and quantifiable goals and strip away the bullshit. Sports force you to look in the mirror and see who you really are.

I've come up short many times in life. I've lost friends and jobs and dignity. I've lost love. I've lost, and it's been ten years, but I still remember what my coach told me and I still remember the victory I found at third place.

(Appeared on MyMetMedia.com)

The best team you never knew

The thump of bare fists on padded torsos filled the gym as rows of uniform-clad students practiced counterpunching techniques at the Auraria Event Center. “Time! Take off your pads and line up!” shouted instructor, and sixth degree black belt, Bill Pottle. The class stood neatly at attention and bowed when Pottle dismissed the class.

Taekwondo first became popular during the Korean War among the South Korean military.

“Taekwondo started out as a traditional martial art. Now it’s a modern Olympic sport,” said Pottle. “There’s all levels of competition.”

The MSU Denver taekwondo program was founded in 1966, and in its 49 years of continuous existence it has earned numerous honors in competition. “Metro is in the Rocky Mountain Collegiate Taekwondo League and is completely undefeated against CSU, CCU, UNC, Air Force Academy, and DU,” said Auraria Campus Taekwondo club president Dean Leverett. The RMCTL is seven years old and holds tournaments every year.

In 2010 Metro hosted 57 teams at the National Collegiate Taekwondo Championships. Metro finished fifth place, defeating sports powerhouses like Stanford, UCLA, the University of Texas, and West Point.

Despite the success and long history of Metro’s taekwondo club, many students remain unaware of its existence. “I constantly have people say, ‘I didn’t know we had Taekwondo here’,” said Leverett. During Fall Fest students could find Leverett standing at the Auraria Campus Taekwondo table trying to attract new students. “Join the Taekwondo team! No experience necessary!” shouted Leverett. “Kick people on campus and get away with it!

Taekwondo is an official class at MSU Denver and can be taken for credit. “I started two years

ago. I was extremely overweight,” said Leverett. “Now I’m gaining more muscle, I’m more flexible than I ever have been.”

Leverett said that one of the greatest benefits to enrolling in a Taekwondo class is the effect it will have on your grade-point average. “You’re learning focus, discipline and self-control. You’re learning confidence,” said Leverett. “So many people have test anxiety. When you learn that confidence and focus you no longer have that, at least not as much as you did.”

The next competition Auraria Campus Taekwondo will participate in is the Fourth Annual Championship Taekwondo Academy Mile High Open in Aurora on Oct. 17. After that they will be traveling to Iowa on Nov. 7 to compete in the newly formed Midwestern Collegiate Taekwondo league.